

Education Committee

March 4, 2012

Public Hearing Testimony Joyce M. Singer, MA; CAS

Good morning. My name is Joyce Singer. I am a resident of Westport, and throughout my more than thirty-five year career in education, I have taught students in Grades 7-12, many in classes for high ability high-potential classes, as well as college students in first-year composition courses and graduate students enrolled in teacher-preparation classes at Fordham University's Graduate School of Education. In addition, I have worked as a reading and language arts consultant in the State of Connecticut providing support to middle school teachers in the areas of reading and writing and also serve as a volunteer board member for the Connecticut Association for the Gifted.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present two personal stories that relate to the consideration of Proposed Bill 1000

I grew up in New York City, and as a result of an IQ test administered when I was in the sixth grade I, and other students who scored above 130, skipped the eighth grade and attended classes with the same body of students for seventh and ninth grade. In addition, I graduated from high school in January, six months before the rest of my class and two months after my sixteenth birthday.

I attended Brooklyn College, which at the time was the most difficult State subsidized school in New York City to gain admittance to as all students needed a minimum A- GPA to be considered for acceptance. Thus, I studied among the best and the brightest peers for four years, although not all of them were recognized as "gifted."

No one knew my age unless I shared that information with them. While I was able to compete with my classmates academically, the fact that I was two years younger often affected my personal decisions, specifically the one to marry at age twenty. Years later, I wondered if the fact many of my friends were either married or engaged affected my decision to marry early. Sometimes, I felt as if I had "missed out" and that I had assumed adult responsibilities while other people my age were carefree. In other words, I may have grown up too soon.

Years later, because my son had attended kindergarten at a private school and had already learned to read and write, we made the decision to allow him to skip first grade. At the time, the school psychologist who tested him told us that the only area in which he was not fully developed was in his fine motor skills, due, "no doubt, to the fact that he is left-handed."

The mistake in the decision to advance our son did not become apparent until he was in high school. Because he was both younger and considerably shorter than his male counterparts, his social development lagged behind theirs. Although he had a girlfriend in his senior year, in my

opinion, he did not begin “coming into his own” until his third year of college and “arrived” only when he went to veterinary school three years after his college graduation.

Had I had the opportunity to turn back the clock, I do not think I would have advanced so quickly, nor would I have made the decision to advance my son that one year. Given what I know now, I probably would have kept him at his age-appropriate grade level and would have sought enrichment in other areas which, at the time, were not as readily available as they are today.

Given these personal experiences, I herewith put forth the following recommendations:

1. That this act be limited only to students in Grade 11;
2. That in addition to the academic requirements needed for advancement, that students be assessed by a psychologist for college readiness and that teachers maintain anecdotal records for identified high ability high potential to further document these students' emotional and social readiness for early entrance into college;
3. That such students do NOT live in segregated housing in residential colleges as their advancement should not be obvious to their classmates and the students also should be able to co-mingle socially with students in their classes;
4. That such students be assigned to the same first-year cohort group which is now an established practice in first-year experience programs specifically designed for freshmen in the majority of schools across the nation. These groups serve to acclimate students to the college/university, and as younger advanced students may have additional adjustment issues, their groups should be led by professors trained to address such issues and any accompanying needs and concerns;
5. That further research be conducted into the literature surrounding the emotional and social development of accelerated students, and
6. That academically gifted high-ability students be given an additional option to conduct typical and field-based research to solve a community, national, or world problem in their senior year of high school. The requirements will include the creation of an activism plan to solve the problem, which they then implement. Students who choose this option should be co-mentored by their high school teacher and by a member of the faculty at the college or university level. Students should then receive college credit (amount to be determined) based upon the level of research and successful completion of the project.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today.